

Lake Superior: environmental progress

The environmental quality of the world's largest freshwater lake is being protected through collaboration between governments and the private sector in a long-term, international lakewide management plan as well as individual remedial action plans.

The government of Ontario is collaborating with other governments and with private sector and various interest groups to preserve environmental quality in Lake Superior, the world's largest freshwater lake. Studies show that the work is getting results.

In Lake Superior, as in the other Great Lakes, Ontario's Ministry of the Environment (MOE), working together with partner governments, municipalities, industries and interest groups, is executing a long-term international lakewide management plan (LaMP) to reduce pollution and preserve environmental quality. MOE's partners in this work are Environment Canada, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, state governments, First Nations and other interest groups.

As the first LaMP to get started, the Lake Superior plan has completed the stage 3 document which outlines the strategies and activities that will be undertaken by the partners in order to meet the interim targets for critical pollution reduction for the next five years.

One goal is not just to reduce but to eliminate completely by the year 2020 the discharge into the lake of nine critical contaminants from sources within the Lake Superior basin ecosystem. These are dioxins, mercury, hexachlorobenzene (HCB) octachlorostyrene (OCS), PCBs and highly persistent insecticides.

Government, municipal and private sector pollution control efforts have already produced solid gains, including achievement of the LaMP interim targets for 2000 for reduction of the most critical contaminants. But action under LaMP is only part of the total

effort to protect Lake Superior. Other remedial action plans developed by the collaborating governments and targeting specific areas of concern in the lake are moving forward.

The private sector is also contributing to the efforts to clean up and protect the lake. The pulp and paper industry, for example, has already spent millions of dollars to eliminate discharges of dioxins and furans from pulp mills in the Lake Superior basin.

Ontario is committed to supporting reduction efforts that are within its jurisdiction within the Lake Superior basin and has made 26 commitments to that end in the LaMP document. The challenge of the future for the federal governments (US-Canada) is, how to deal with the pollutants that enter the lake from beyond the basin. They arrive by long range transport within the atmosphere. The long range movement of pollutants from national and international sources remains the most significant challenge to the protection of the long term health of the lake.

Current projects

- The ministry is continuing to work actively with 7 pulp mills on the lake to promote the use of environmentally friendly products and processes which will result in reductions of discharges of critical pollutants.
- In Thunder Bay harbour, MOE is collaborating with industry and the federal government in a \$9-million cleanup of lakebed sediment that has been contaminated by wood preservatives.

- In the same area, MOE is collaborating with the City of Thunder Bay and other partners in a remedial action plan to promote environmentally friendly techniques for shoreline development that protect and improve fish and wildlife habitat.

Mercury

- Because of its use in electronic and other devices, its long survival in the environment and its tendency to build up in the food chain and cause health impairment, mercury has a high place in environmental protection and cleanup programs.
- Cooperative projects are going forward in collaboration with municipalities and interest groups in Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie and Marathon to reduce the amount of mercury entering the lake. Collection depots have been established for discarded button-type batteries and these will be diverted from domestic waste disposal sites and properly disposed at hazardous waste handling facilities.
- MOE will continue to develop partnerships to address the proper disposal of other mercury bearing products such as fluorescent lights and household thermostats

Note:

Further information is available in Environment Canada's *Third Report of Progress Under the Canada-Ontario Agreement Respecting the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem 1997-1999* at the Web site <http://www.cciw.ca/green-lane/coa/third-progress-report/intro.html>

Comments concerning this report and the Lake Superior LaMP program may be forwarded to the: Regional Office, Ministry of the Environment, 435 S. James St., Suite 331, Thunder Bay, Ontario, P7E 6S7, Attention: Eric Janhunen.

For more information:

Ministry of the Environment
Public Information Centre
(416) 325-4000 or
toll-free 1-800-565-4923
Internet: <http://www.ene.gov.on.ca>

1